Whitefish Transportation Plan
&
Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

Public Informational Meeting No. 1

April 16th, 2007

Montana Department of Transportation
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Introductions & Opening Remarks

- Robert Peccia & Associates
  - Traffic Engineers and Transportation Planners
  - Jeff Key, P.E. – Project Manager
  - Dan Norderud, AICP – Transportation Planner
- Montana Department of Transportation
  - Dwane Kailey, P.E.
  - Shane Stack, P.E.
  - Sheila Ludlow
- City of Whitefish
  - John Wilson, P.E.
  - Robert Horne, AICP
  - Karin Hilding, P.E.

Purpose of Meeting

- Introduce the two (2) projects currently underway.
- Introduce the project team and convey appropriate contact information.
- Present the project schedule and development parameters.
- Solicit input from the community on transportation related concerns.
- Provide an opportunity for formal and informal contact with the various responsible parties to the two (2) projects.

Overview of Projects

- Two (2) Distinct Projects
  - Community-wide Transportation Plan
  - Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93
- Project 1: ***Community-wide Transportation Plan***
  - No comprehensive Transportation Study has been undertaken to date within the City and surrounding area.
  - Several “sub-area” studies have been completed.
  - Land use changes and livability issues have heightened.
  - *Growth Policy Update* process is in motion.
  - The time is appropriate for a comprehensive transportation planning effort.

Overview of Projects

- Project 2: ***Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93***
  - "Whitefish-Urban" design project is a result of Somers-Whitefish *Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) / Record of Decision*
  - "Whitefish-Urban" *Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Re-Evaluation* currently in process. The preliminary results indicate changed conditions from original EIS conclusions
  - Decision made that enough has changed in the community that a "pre-NEPA Corridor Study" should be undertaken before modifying the preferred alternative.
  - The "corridor study" is to be completed in concert with the overall transportation planning process.
  - The corridor study will follow "pre-NEPA" guidance for corridor studies and will identify/recommend design options for US 93 through the Whitefish urban area.

Whitefish Transportation Plan (Transportation Planning Process)

- General Overview
- Traditional Methodology

  - ***Inventory*** the conditions and characteristics of the existing transportation system.

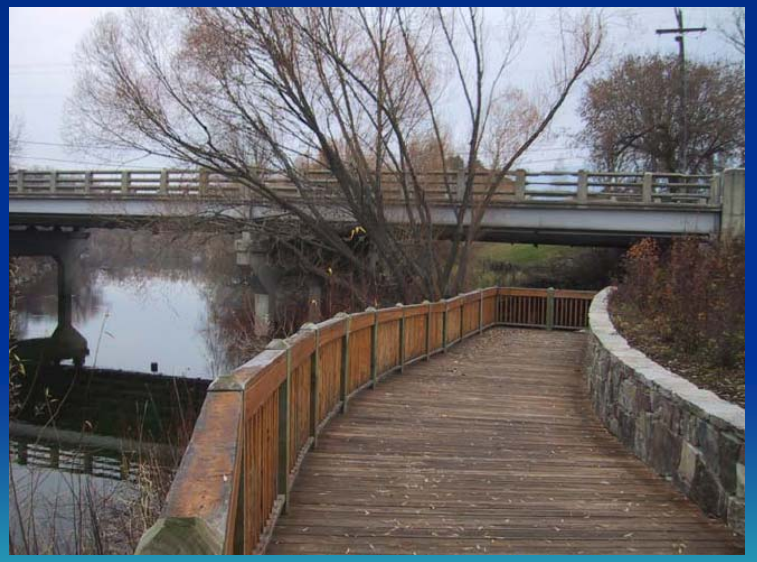
  - ***Analyze*** inventoried data to determine the relationships that affect development, transportation demand, and transportation system usage.

  - ***Forecast*** the future development patterns and the associated travel demand, supply and performance of the transportation system.

  - ***Evaluate*** the forecasts to decide the best transportation improvements.

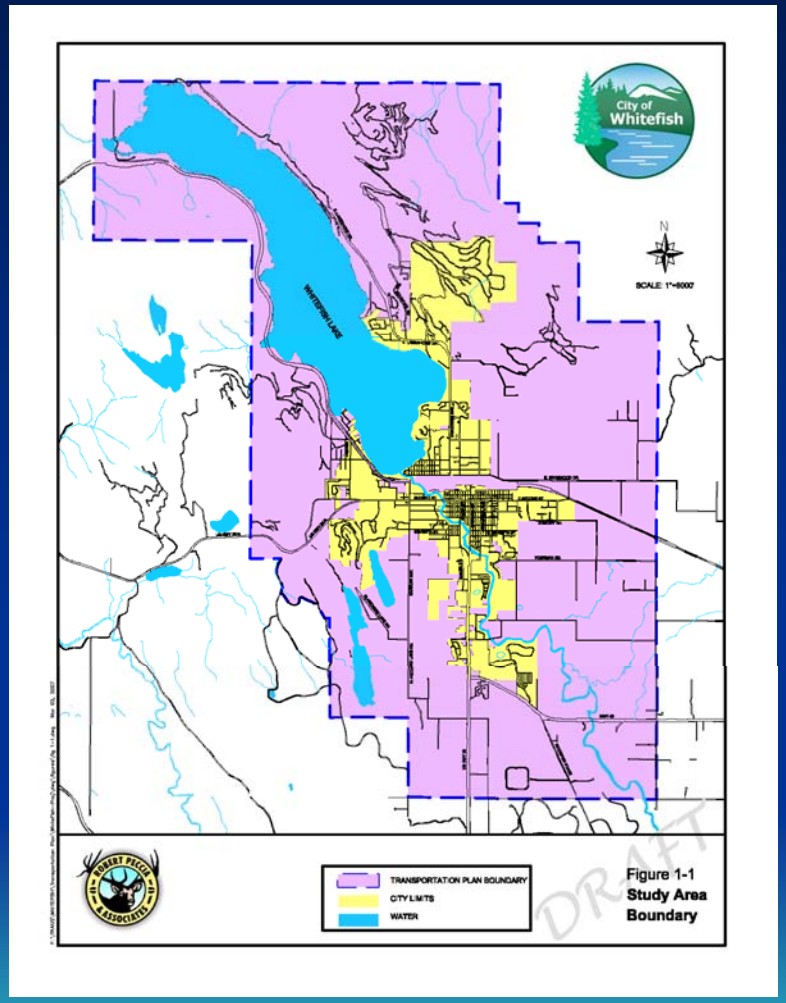
Whitefish Transportation Plan (Transportation Planning Process)

- Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Strategies
- Alternative Travel Modes (Bicycle/Pedestrian/Transit)
- Traffic Calming Measures
- Corridor Preservation and Access Management Guidelines



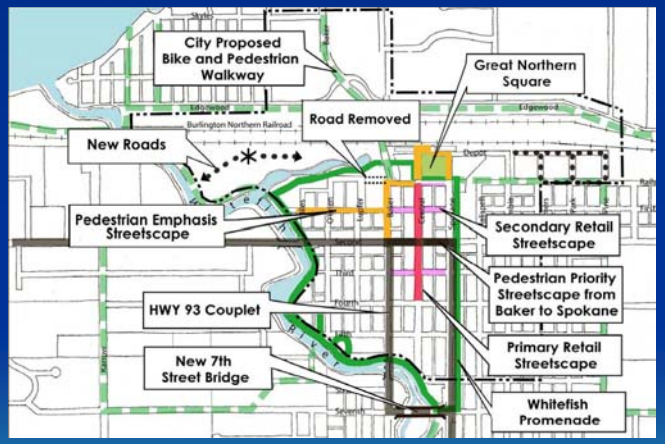
Whitefish Transportation Plan (Study Area Boundary)

- Follows the current *Growth Policy Update* boundary



Whitefish Transportation Plan (Focus Areas)

- Will focus on improving vehicular circulation and safety
- Will focus on identifying non-motorized amenities that make the community a livable place (bicycle, pedestrian, and transit)
- Will recognize the needs of future land use changes that inevitably will occur in the community
- Will be sensitive to prior processes and results
  - *Downtown Business District Master Plan*
  - Previous Transportation Studies
  - Original US 93 *Environmental Impact Study (EIS)*
  - Current *Growth Policy Update*
  - Other community documents



- Will assess the needs of the community's transportation system in a comprehensive manner, recognizing the diversity of users in the community

Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

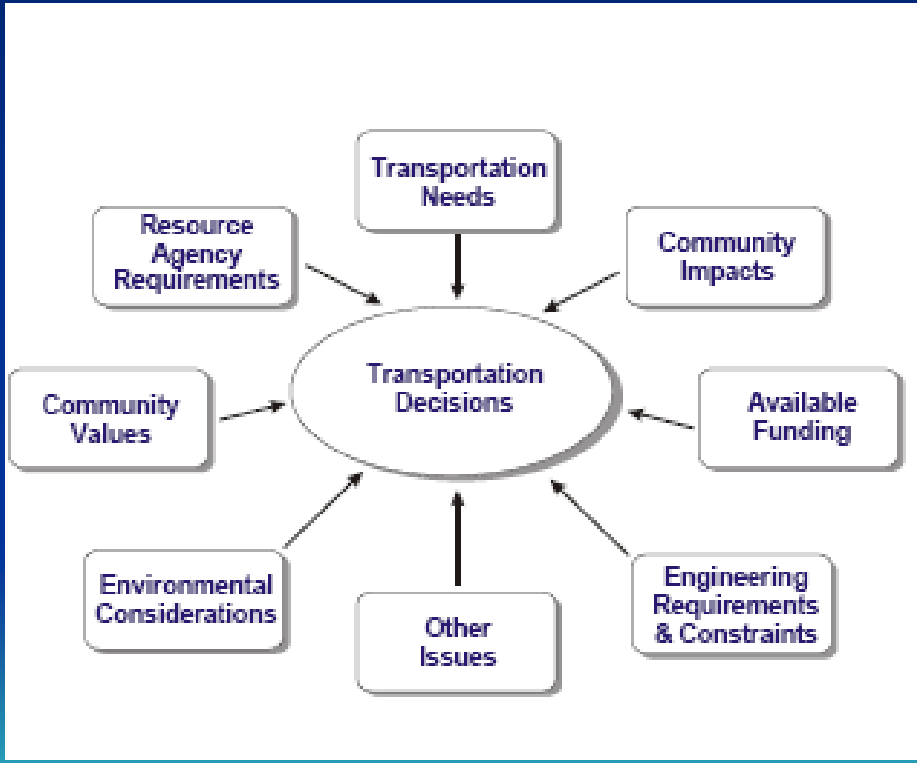
- **Definitions**

  - **CORRIDOR PLANNING** - *A collaborative process for making transportation decisions and guiding major transportation investments within an established corridor area.*

  - **CORRIDOR STUDY** – *A detailed evaluation of an existing transportation system within a designated corridor including factors and issues affecting the system and recommendations for how the system should be changed to meet long-term transportation needs.*

Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

- Corridor Planning Supports Transportation Decisions By Considering:



Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

- Major Benefits of Corridor Planning:
  - Allows agencies, local government, and the public to work together to develop solutions to corridor issues and transportation needs.
  - Helps resolve major planning issues before the start of project development
  - Provides an opportunity to direct future development and minimize environmental, social, and economic impacts
  - Helps link land-use planning and transportation planning
  - Protects transportation investments by exploring alternate means to help accommodate transportation needs
  - Compatible with the NEPA principles, supports the NEPA process

Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

- Corridor studies and NEPA both have similar goals:
  - Make decisions in the best overall interest of the community and use a collaborative process that incorporates technical analyses of alternatives and public input.
  - The purpose of NEPA is to include environmental consideration into Federal agency planning and action. This is done by providing decision makers and other stakeholders with the information they need to understand potential environmental impacts of proposed actions.
  - **People make better decisions when they have clear information about the consequences and trade-offs associated with taking any given course of action.**

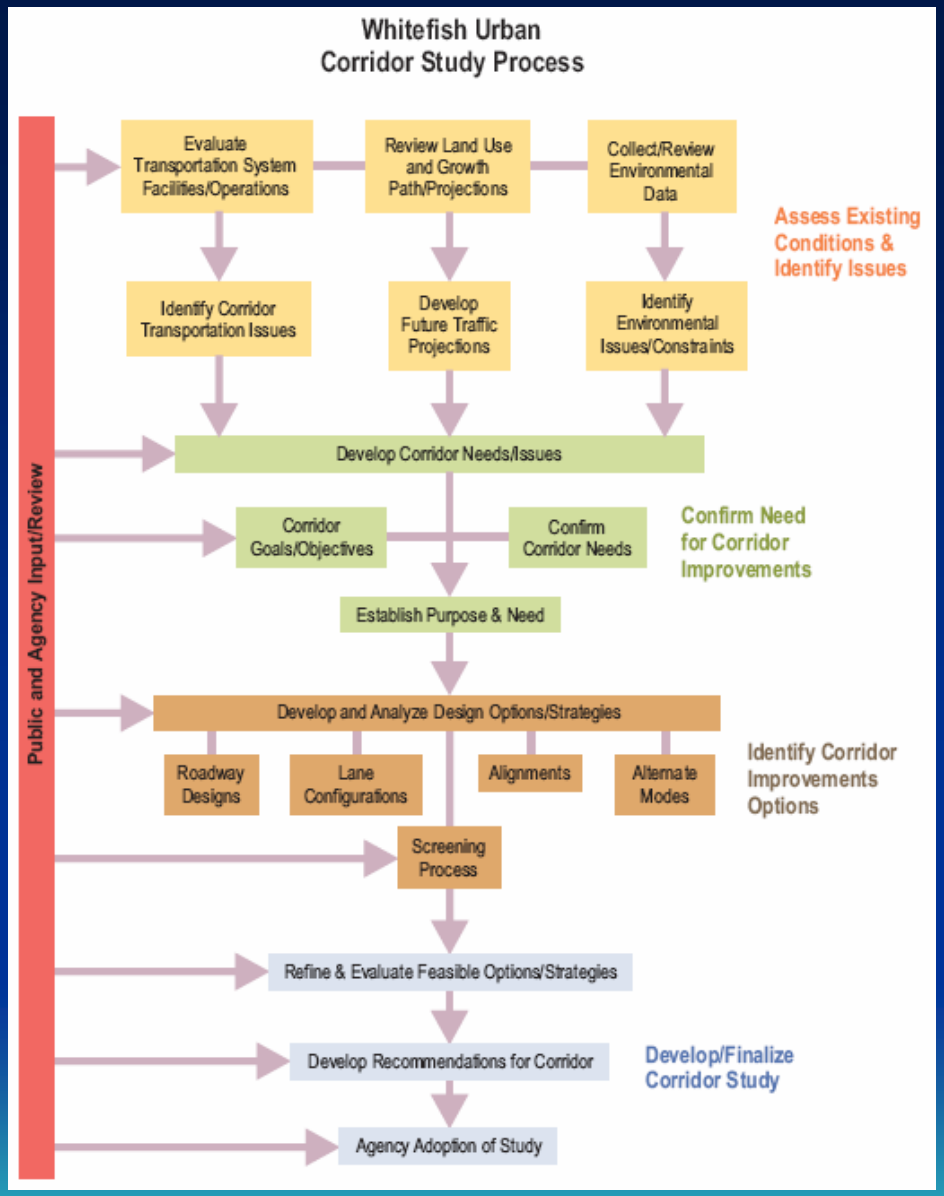
Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

- Whitefish Urban Corridor Study
  - Being developed within context of and concurrent with Whitefish Transportation Plan
  - Starts with a broad look at community's transportation needs and issues
  - Will identify existing and projected travel patterns to year 2030
  - Analyses will suggest needed facilities and system improvements
  - Transportation Plan findings will allow us to take a focused look at the US 93 Corridor through Whitefish
  - Allows us to consider new and relevant information like:
    - Community land use/growth projections (i.e. *Growth Policy Update*)
    - *Downtown Business District Master Plan*
    - Community goals and interests for Highway 93

Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

- Whitefish Urban Corridor Study
  - Pre-NEPA Corridor Study
  - Not being completed with the development of NEPA document
  - Corridor Study and its recommendations will be developed and documented in a manner consistent with the intent of NEPA
  - Recommendations from Corridor Study will be used by MDT and made part of the appropriate NEPA Process/Document

Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93



Project Schedule

- Twelve (12) Month Project Timeline
- “Notice-to-Proceed” Issued ~ December 28th, 2006
- Four (4) Sets of Public Informational Meetings
- “Draft” Transportation Plan/Corridor Study (10/2007)
- “Final” Transportation Plan/Corridor Study (11/2007)
- Public Hearings between Draft and Final
- See Graphic

PROJECT SCHEDULE
Whitefish Transportation Plan
Urban Corridor Study of US 93

2007

WORK TASKS & DESCRIPTIONS	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
WHITEFISH TRANSPORTATION PLAN												
Task 1: Review Study Area Boundary												
Task 2: Assemble, Review and Analyze Existing Data & Reports												
Task 3: Identify Goals & Objectives												
Task 4: Data Collection and Field Studies												
Task 5: Develop Socioeconomic Baseline and Forecasts												
Task 6: Develop Land Use Baseline and Forecasts												
Task 7: Travel Demand Modeling of Existing and Projected Conditions												
Task 8: Analysis and Problem Identification												
Task 9: Alternatives Modeling and Assessment												
Task 10: Analyze Alternative Modes of Transportation												
Task 11: Develop Traffic Calming Suggestions												
Task 12: Miscellaneous Issues and Products												
Task 13: Develop Preliminary Recommendations												
Task 14: Evaluate Transportation Financing Mechanisms												
Task 15: Prioritize Recommended Improvements												
Task 16: Report Preparation												
URBAN CORRIDOR STUDY OF US 93												
Task 17: Research & Analyze the Existing Transportation System												
Task 18: Determine Current and Planned Land Uses												
Task 19: Analyze the Future Travel Demand on the Transportation System												
Task 20: Review the Corridor Boundary & Establish Statement of Purpose & Need												
Task 21: Develop Preliminary Conceptual Design Options												
Task 22: Develop Screening Criteria for Preliminary Conceptual Design Options												
Task 23: Refine Analysis of Feasible Conceptual Design Options & Strategies												
Task 24: Prepare the Corridor Plan												
COMBINED PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT												
Task 25: Public Participation, Meetings & Other Public Outreach												
Meetings With Project Oversight Committee (POC)												
Four (4) Public Meetings												
Four (4) Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) Meetings												
POC Workshop												
CAC Workshop												
LUAC Workshop												
City Council Presentations												
Miscellaneous Project Outreach (10 total - 5 activities two times)												
Formal Public Hearing (City Council)												
Project Website												

Workstation Breakout (~30 minutes)

- Three workstations to visit
  - Community Transportation Concerns
  - Alternative Travel Modes (Bicycle/Pedestrian/Transit)
  - US 93 Corridor Concerns
- Ask Questions, jot down comments, mark on exhibits
- Summarize @ 6:15 pm

Known Community Transportation Issues / Key Themes

Whitefish Transportation Plan
Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

Traffic Operations

Traffic and circulation problems exist along Highway 93 through downtown Whitefish and there is a lack of east-west road connections within the community.

- FEIS projected traffic through 2015 based on modeling parameters such as land use, population, and growth trends apparent during 1993-1994.
- The Whitefish area experiences substantial seasonal variation in traffic volumes with traffic volumes dramatically higher in the June-August period.
- Congestion along Highway 93 results in traffic diversion to city streets not designated to carry through traffic.
- Community surveys showed support for connections between US 93 and Karrow, extending Baker Avenue to south, and a connection to Voerman Road along 13th Street.
- Community surveys also showed some opposition to 7th Street Bridge connecting Baker and Spokane Avenues.

Robert Peccia & Associates - Helena & Kalispell, MT

Whitefish Transportation Plan
Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

Safety

Existing street configurations and development patterns, high traffic volumes, and numbers of driveway accesses along the US 93 corridor contribute to safety concerns for motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists within the community.

- High number of existing driveway access points along Highway 93 corridor in Whitefish.
- The FEIS indicated crash rates within Whitefish were substantially higher than statewide averages for other urban areas. Intersection, intersection-related, driveway access, rear-end, and angle collisions on Highway 93 through Whitefish (includes highway north of Kalispell) occurred 3 to 10 times more often than statewide.
- Driver safety is a concern at high-volume intersections with Highway 93.
- Cross streets and parallel streets are needed to improve access to businesses along Highway 93 South.
- Strip commercial development, a jumble of individual accesses onto U.S. Highway 93, an unsafe mix of highway speed traffic and traffic entering/leaving individual businesses are present on U.S. Highway 93 South.

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Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

Trucks

Truck traffic is a problem in Whitefish and affects safety, the environment, and the downtown image. The future design for US 93 should attempt to mitigate that traffic through the community to the extent possible.

- Highway 93 corridor through Whitefish was identified as a primary route used by logging and chip trucks, and other large commercial transporters.
- Large commercial motor vehicles accounted for 8-13% of traffic in the corridor at time of FEIS.
- Several highway bypass options were considered but dropped from consideration because the traffic modeling showed such options would not divert sufficient traffic volumes off US Highway 93 to justify their cost. The public also opposed bypass options presented in the FEIS.
- Are intersections in Whitefish capable of being adequately designed to handle large vehicles and heavy traffic volumes?
- Concerns about more traffic on Baker Avenue – with associated truck traffic, noise, and intrusion on neighborhood.

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Known Community Transportation Issues / Key Themes

Parking

Improvements to US 93 could impact parking availability in the downtown.

- The FEIS identified that the preferred alternative for US 93 through Whitefish would result in the loss of on-street parking.
- The Downtown Business District Master Plan identified a lack of adequate parking and advocated building new parking facilities to support downtown businesses and retail.

Whitefish Transportation Plan
Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

Pedestrian/Bicycle Facilities

Pedestrian and bicycle facilities are an essential and desirable element of the local transportation system.

- Public input during the development of the EIS clearly indicated a preference for enhancing pedestrian and bicyclist facilities in US 93 corridor and incorporating separated pedestrian/bicycle paths wherever feasible.
- Highway improvements need to ensure connections with the City of Whitefish's planned pedestrian/bicyclist trails and facilities.
- Walking, running and bicycling are important activities and modes of transportation in the Whitefish area and there is broad support for bike trails and sidewalks.
- Safety for pedestrians and bicyclists, however, is compromised by lack of sidewalks and paths along busy, high-speed roads.
- The Downtown Business District Master Plan advocates the development of a pedestrian-friendly environment to encourage visitors and residents to utilize downtown businesses and identified a shared, multi-use trail around the downtown.
- Strengthen alternative transportation modes to reduce traffic congestion, including pedestrian, bicycle and transit.

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Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

Natural Environment

Transportation improvements have the potential to affect the natural environment, most notably at highway crossings of the Whitefish River.

- Wetlands and a designated 100-year floodplain exist along the Whitefish River.
- Whitefish is designated as a Non-attainment area for PM-10 (small particulate matter) and particulates emissions will increase as the number of vehicle miles of travel increases.
- The natural environment is a primary factor in the community's appeal to visitors and residents.
- General support for environmental protection in the community.

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Known Community Transportation Issues / Key Themes

Human Environment

Transportation improvements have the potential to affect historic properties, a potential historic residential district, and involve sites with hazardous materials concerns.

- The FEIS identified 37 properties in the Highway 93 corridor area (Spokane Avenue/2nd Street East/Baker Avenue) that were on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places or that contributed to proposed Whitefish Historic Residential District.
- A Phase II Hazardous Materials Assessment for the US 93 done in 2005 identified more than 20 sites in the Whitefish Urban project area with documented or potential hazardous material contamination issues.

Whitefish Transportation Plan
Urban Corridor Study of US Highway 93

Land Use/Growth

The Whitefish area continues to grow at a rapid pace resulting in notable changes to existing and planned land uses in the community. Transportation improvements must be adaptable and flexible to accommodate future growth in the Whitefish area.

- Commercial strip development along US 93 contributes to traffic volumes and complexity of traffic movements in Whitefish.
- The auto and truck traffic along 2nd Street fragments the retail core along Central Avenue.
- Downtown Business District Master Plan represents a community vision for redeveloping downtown Whitefish and was not considered in FEIS. The plan will be used to guide the development of privately- and publicly-owned parcels and offers strategies for improving the appearance, function, and vitality of the downtown area.
- General support for controlling and even limiting growth in the community.

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Aesthetics

Preserving the character and "small town feel" is essential to Whitefish's economic vitality and quality of life.

- Considerable support for protecting traditional neighborhood character (streetscape)
- Improve look of highway corridors through development of "gateways" and architectural and landscaping enhancements.

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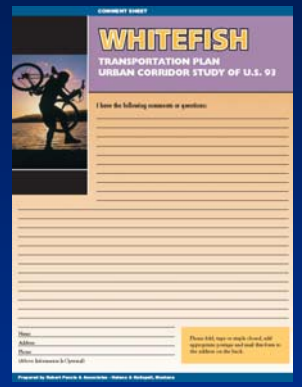
Concluding Remarks/Questions?

Questions, answers and/or comments?



Project Website: www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/whitefish

Project Contacts:

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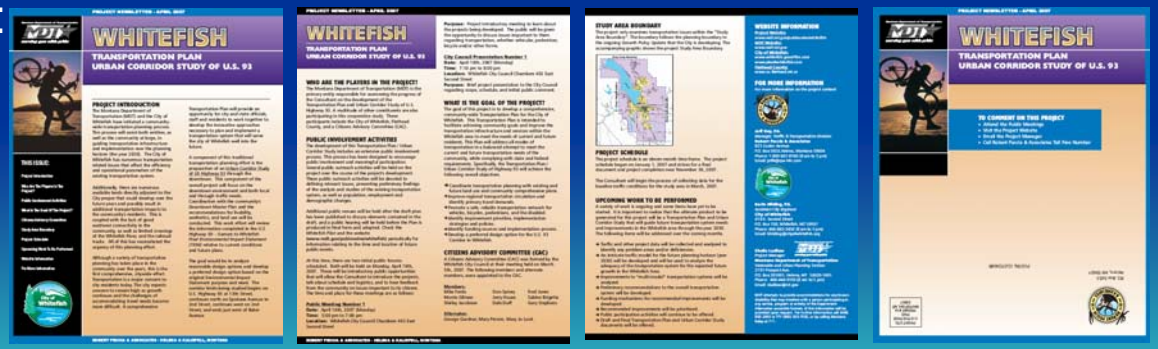
MT Dept. of Transportation
1-406-444-9193

Project Newsletters:



Conclude at 6:45 pm